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# Los Angeles Times

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## Education takes a beating nationwide

*More layoffs, bigger classes, fewer programs and higher tuition are nothing new to U.S. educators, but analysts say this year stands out.*

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**July 31, 2011** | By Stephen Ceasar and Teresa Watanabe, Los Angeles Times

After a particularly brutal budgeting season this summer, states and school districts across the country have fired thousands of teachers, raised college tuition, relaxed standards, slashed days off the academic calendar and gutted pre-kindergarten and summer school programs.

Slashed budgets are nothing new for educators, but experts say this year stands out.

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Last year, K-12 budgets were cut \$1.8 billion nationwide. According to estimates by the National Assn. of State Budget Officers, cuts to K-12 for the new fiscal year may reach \$2.5 billion.

A year ago, higher-education budgets across the nation were trimmed \$1.2 billion. The expected cuts this year: \$5 billion.

"They've long since been cutting deep into the bone," said Michael Leachman of the nonpartisan Center on Budget Policies and Priorities, based in Washington.

At least 22 states have scaled back K-12 funding and at least 24 have made cuts in higher education for fiscal year 2012, the center found.

To cover such shortfalls, experts say, school officials often reduce, or eliminate, personnel and programs vital to the most vulnerable populations: lower-income and minority students.

In California, many school districts cut spending for adult education, libraries, textbooks, arts and music, gifted students, tutoring for low-performing high school students and other programs, according to two major surveys, including one by the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office. Many districts shortened the 180-day school year by five days.

"These are extraordinarily inequitable cuts for low-income communities of color," said Arun Ramanathan, executive director of the Education Trust-West, an Oakland-based advocacy group.

He said that a shorter academic year and cuts to summer classes exacerbate their generally lagging achievement because many low-income students cannot afford the enriched activities enjoyed by their middle-class counterparts, such as museum visits and private tutoring.

In Florida, state funds for 15,000 children to attend a school-readiness program for low-income families have been cut, and college tuition was raised 15% for the fourth consecutive year. Texas eliminated funding for pre-kindergarten programs that serve about 100,000 at-risk children.

Though cuts in education reach all demographics, they do not affect all students equally, said Jack Jennings, president of the Center on Education Policy, a nonpartisan research group based in Washington.

"If we're worried about the future, we have to be worried about these equity issues," Jennings said. "Who's going to be the employees, the industry leaders in the future? Increasingly, they will be children of color, and they're not going to close the achievement gap."

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Across the country, education officials are finding ways to save money:

In California, many districts have cut back on high school counselors, leaving many students to sort out the college application process on their own.

In New Mexico, some school districts have gone to four-day school weeks.

In Illinois, high school juniors will no longer be evaluated on writing skills after the state eliminated a writing test, saving about \$2.4 million.

University of California students will pay \$1,818 more in tuition this year than last, after increases of 8% and 9.6%, and Cal State University tuition will rise by \$294, to \$5,472.

In Washington state, lawmakers cut more than \$1 billion in class-size reduction, early learning programs and teacher development.

Reaction to such cutbacks has varied. Outside Sioux Falls, S.D., teachers and administrators in the Brandon Valley School District worked without pay during summer school to stave off cancellation of the summer program.

At Wonderland Elementary School in Los Angeles' Laurel Canyon, parents have managed to raise \$450,000 a year to retain science, art, physical education, teachers' assistants, yard supervision and a librarian for a library completed two years ago, parent leader Teri Levy said.

But they have not been able to prevent class sizes from swelling, as they have around the state. At Wonderland, classes in the lower grades have grown from 20 to 28 students in the last few years.

"It's so packed that teachers can't focus on all of the kids in the class," Levy said.

In many parts of the country, parents and teachers have taken to the streets to protest, but to little effect.

In Philadelphia, parents mustered 400 signatures on a petition in hopes of saving the job of Hau Chau, a bilingual counseling assistant at H.A. Brown Elementary. Chau was the only Vietnamese-speaking employee at a school where 18% of students speak the language at home.

"The students feel comfortable, feel protected when I'm there," Chau said. "I try to guide them and talk to their teachers to find a way for the students to feel comfortable and happy while they are in school."

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